

Message Text

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73/54

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 AID-20 DRC-01 /110 W
----- 045596

R 011142Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2021

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL UDORN

USSAG NKP

13TH ADVON UDORN

S E C R E T BANGKOK 5311

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 6)

EE.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, MOPR, TH, LA

SUBJECT: PL/NVA THREAT TO THAILAND

REFS: (A) STATE 43210; (B) VIENTIANE 2484; (C) UDORN 69

1. WE TEND TO VIEW THE COMPLETION OF RECONSTRUCTION OF ROUTE 81 IN MUCH THE SAME TERMS AS VIENTIANE (REF. B). THE MECHANISM FOR SUPPORTING THE THAI INSURGENCY, APART FROM THE PRESENCE OF REGULAR NVA UNITS ALONG THE MEKONG, HAS EXISTED SINCE THE LATE 1950'S. THE FACT THAT OLD FRENCH ROUTE 81 HAD DETERIORATED OVER THE YEARS NEVER SERIOUSLY HINDERED THE COMMUNISTS FROM MAINTAINING INFILTRATION AND EXFILTRATION OF CADRE AND RECRUITS AT LEVELS THEY DESIRED. RECONSTRUCTION OF ROUTE 81 MEANS ONLY THAT HANOI HAS AN IMPROVED CAPACITY TO MOVE TO THE MEKONG RIVER AND TO SUPPORT PL/NVA FORCES IN KHAMMOUANE PROVINCE IF IT MAKES THE DECISION TO DO SO.

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2. AS NOTED BY VIENTIANE, THE QUESTION IS MORE ONE OF

INTENT. WE AGREE WITH VIENTIANE THAT THE MEKONG FIRINGS ON THAI PATROL BOATS ARE NOT SUFFICIENT INDICATORS OF INTENT. WE BELIEVE THAT THE RTG, ALREADY NERVOUS OVER UNSUBSTANTIATED REPORTS OF INCREASED CT CROSSINGS INTO THAILAND, HAD ORDERED MORE STRICT RIVER SURVEILLANCE BY THE MEKONG RIVER OPERATIONS UNIT (MROU). THIS RESULTED IN THAI PATROL BOATS PASSING CLOSER TO THE LAO SIDE THAN BEFORE, AND PROBABLY IN LAO WATERS. AFTER THREE INCIDENTS OF PL/NVA SMALL ARMS FIRE ON THAI PATROL BOATS, THE RTG ORDERED THE MROU TO AVOID INCIDENTS AND PATROL ROUTES HAVE BEEN ALTERED (REF. C).

3. OF MORE SIGNIFICANCE WOULD BE THE CONSTRUCTION OF MILITARY FORTIFICATIONS OR ARTILLERY POSITIONS BY THE PL/NVA. TWO EMBASSY OFFICERS TOURED THE THAI SIDE OF THE MEKONG IN THE AFFECTED AREA MARCH 25-28 IN THE COMPANY OF MROU PERSONNEL TO OBTAIN FIRST-HAND IMPRESSIONS. THEY FOUND NO INDICATIONS OF PL/NVA MILITARY CONSTRUCTION OR OF PL/NVA ARTILLERY POSITIONS IN THE VICINITY OF THE MOUTH OF THE HIN BOUN RIVER.

4. FROM OUR VIEW, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POINT IS THAT, WHETHER OR NOT THE NVA CHOOSES TO WITHDRAW SOME OR ALL OF ITS UNITS FROM LAOS AS A RESULT OF THE LAOS AGREEMENT AND PROTOCOLS, THE CAPABILITY OF THE COMMUNIST SIDE TO SUPPORT THE THAI INSURGENCY WILL NOT BE AFFECTED. NEITHER THE RLG NOR THE RTG HAVE THE CAPACITY TO BLOCK INFILTRATION OVER THE MILES OF THINLY INHABITED BOUNDARY. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE REPORTS THAT THAI INSURGENTS TRAVEL TO AND FROM THE DRV AND THE PRC, WHERE THEY RECEIVE TRAINING, PERHAPS IN INCREASING NUMBERS.

5. OUR OFFICERS REPORT, ALSO, THAT RTG OFFICIALS IN NAKHON PHANOM HAVE HEARD FROM VIETNAMESE REFUGEES LIVING IN THAT PROVINCE THAT FRIENDS AND RELATIVES WHO LEFT THAILAND SOME YEARS AGO HAVE RE-APPEARED ON THE LAO SIDE OF THE RIVER AT HINBOUN AND BUN KHOUANG AS NVA OFFICERS. RTG OFFICIALS SUSPECT, BUT HAVE NO EVIDENCE, THAT THESE OFFICERS COME INTO THAILAND TO COLLECT INTELLIGENCE OR TO AID THE INSURGENCY. THIS WOULD HARDLY BE SURPRISING

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IN VIEW OF THE KNOWN SUPPORT TO THE INSURGENCY PROVIDED BY NVA OFFICERS UNDER THE GUISE OF PL IN THE 26TH PL/NVA COMBINED BATTALION.

6. AS FAR AS THE THREAT TO US MILITARY FACILITIES AT NKP IS CONCERNED, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT ANY FACTORS MENTIONED IN THIS TELEGRAM EITHER INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY ENEMY CAPABILITIES OR ARE SUFFICIENT INDICATORS OF INTENT

TO ATTACH OR HARASS. THE NVA COULD ALWAYS HAVE MOUNTED SOME KIND OF OPERATION AGAINST NKP HAD IT WISHED TO DO SO, ALTHOUGH EVEN A SUCCESSFUL HARASSING ACTION WOULD REQUIRE CONSIDERABLY MORE FORCE THAT IT NOW DISPOSES. OUR ASSESSMENT REMAINS THAT THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE NVA WILL USE ROUTE 81 FOR AN ARMED INCURSION INTO THAILAND IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

7. IN SUMMARY, WE FEEL THAT THE NVA PRESENCE IN MR III ALONG THE MEKONG AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ROUTE 81 DO NOT NOW REPRESENT A SUDDENLY AND SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED THREAT TO US BASES IN THAILAND, NOR A DRV INTENTION TO ALTER ITS PRESENT MODE OF INTERVENTION IN THE THAI INSURGENCY. DRV COVERT SUPPORT FOR THE THAI INSURGENCY WILL CONTINUE AND MAY INCREASE, BUT THIS DOES NOT DEPEND ON THE PRESENCE OF REGULAR NVA UNITS IN MR III.

8. WE AGREE, NEVERTHELESS, THAT IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT WITH THE RTG AND THE RLG, AND TO FOLLOW THIS UP WITH A DISCREET MENTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS OF THESE FURTHER INDICATIONS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, WE PERHAPS SHOULD AVOID UNDULY ALARMING OUR FRIENDS. WE CAN SUGGEST THAT HANOI IS CURRENTLY TOO PREOCCUPIED WITH ITS MARTIAL DIVERSIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA, NOT TO MENTION ITS NATIONAL ECONOMIC PRIORITY OF RECONSTRUCTION AT HOME, TO MAKE EXTENSIVE USE OF ROUTE 81 AT THIS TIME.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INFILTRATION, CONSTRUCTION, INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION, COMBAT ZONES, COMBAT OPERATIONS, MILITARY PLANS, HIGHWAYS, COMMUNISTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BANGKO05311
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740072-0831, D740071-0878
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740479/aaaactzq.tel
Line Count: 143
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: (A) STATE 43210; (B) VIENTIANE 2484;
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06-Aug-2002 by shawdg>; APPROVED <14 FEB 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PL/NVA THREAT TO THAILAND
TAGS: PINR, MOPS, TH, LA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005